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HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE US

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE TAKES LEAD IN PROMOTING ACCESS TO PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS AS CATALYSTS TO IMPROVED PUBLIC HEALTH AND LOWER HEALTHCARE COSTS

SAN FRANCISCO, March 30, 2011: The connection between parks, public lands and health takes the national spotlight next week as National Park Service (NPS) Director Jon Jarvis hosts a cross-sector ***Healthy Parks Healthy People US*** forum in the Golden Gate National Parks. Co-hosted by the Institute at the Golden Gate and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, the conference will be held April 5-6, 2011 at Fort Baker in Sausalito, California.

Bringing together more than 100 leaders in health care, the environment, nonprofits, government and business, Jarvis will lead discussions on how the NPS can most effectively help drive health and wellness initiatives in America's local, state and national parks, and how parks can promote healthier lifestyles leading to reduced health care costs.

"Parks are a great untapped resource in fostering health and wellness across the U.S.," said Jarvis. "Our national parks have always been loved for their symbolism and scenery, but we aim to increase the awareness of all parks as places for exercise and healthy living."

As numerous national studies have shown, America's health crisis has manifested itself in dramatic increases in heart ailments, diabetes, obesity and other diseases. Driven by inactive lifestyles and poor nutrition, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 72 million adults in the United States are medically obese and more than 40 percent do not exercise regularly. However, research suggests that exposure to nature and participation in outdoor exercise have significant health benefits, including

improved wellness and mental health, reduced stress and lower blood pressure. As a result, parks across the U.S. and around the world are now realigning their focus to promote the positive connections between the health of the natural world and the health of humankind.

Modeled on the international Healthy Parks Healthy People movement that originated in Australia, *Healthy Parks Healthy People US* complements President Obama's *America's Great Outdoors* initiative, a multi-agency effort that has sparked a national conversation on how to conserve open spaces and reconnect Americans to nature. As part of its leadership role in *Healthy Parks Healthy People US*, the NPS has expanded First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* program to include *Let's Move Outside Junior Rangers*, and is also forging links with other relevant parks-inspired health programs, including *Children & Nature*, *Park Prescriptions*, *Food for the Parks*, *No Child Left Inside*, and others.

"*America's Great Outdoors* promotes greater access to nature as a catalyst to better human and community health," Jarvis said. "Our leadership in *Healthy Parks Healthy People US* supports these efforts and speaks to the Park Service's century-long commitment to preserve the environment for responsible public access and the enjoyment of all Americans." Across the country, parks of all sizes are beginning dialogues and developing programs with the healthcare community, and private sector partners including Kaiser Permanente and UnitedHealth Group, have stepped forward in support of NPS goals.

"The connections between personal health and America's parks have been evident since before Boston Common was set aside as one of the world's first public parks in 1634," Jarvis concluded. "Then and now, parks are a direct reflection of the American ideal that public lands must be protected from rapid urbanization, and that personal access to the natural world plays a vital role in our physical and emotional well-being."

Editors Please Note: The *Healthy Parks Healthy People US* Opening Session (Tuesday, April 5th, 9:00-9:45 am PST) and Closing Session (Wednesday, April 6th, 11:45-12:15 pm PST), both featuring remarks by NPS Director Jon Jarvis, will be webcast live at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/hphpUS> and accessible via www.nps.gov and www.instituteatgoldengate.org.

Working reporters wishing to cover the conference must secure media credentials in advance by contacting Howard Levitt at howard_levitt@nps.gov or Kat English at kenglish@mackenziesf.com.

About the National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS) is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior charged with managing the preservation and public use of America's most significant natural, scenic, historic and cultural treasures. The NPS manages the Golden Gate National Parks, as well as 394 other park sites across the U.S. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/goga or call (415) 561-4700.

About the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

The Parks Conservancy is the nonprofit membership organization created to preserve the Golden Gate National Parks, enhance the experiences of park visitors, and build a community dedicated to conserving the parks for the future. The Conservancy is an authorized "cooperating association" of the National Park Service, and is one of more than 70 such nonprofit organizations working with national parks around the country. To learn more, please visit www.parksconservancy.org or call (415) 561-3000.

About the Institute at the Golden Gate

The Institute at the Golden Gate is a program of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, in partnership with the National Park Service, promoting dialogue, collaboration and action for a sustainable world. The Institute draws on the talent, innovation and motivation of the Bay Area and Silicon Valley, and from the magnificent facilities at Fort Baker and Cavallo Point—the Lodge at the Golden Gate, to foster relationships with a diverse, cross-sector array of groups, organizations and individuals who share a common commitment to environmental and social action and change. For more information, visit www.instituteatgoldengate.org or call (415) 561-3560.

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